liable to be condemned as Jacobins or radicals. Percival, though politically the most moderate of Whigs, did not escape this censure.

Percival's Character

Percival's supposed radicalism was alluded to in one of the few accounts of him by someone outside the medical profession. In his *Autobiography*, Thomas de Quincey wrote that Dr Percival:

> was a literary man of elegant tastes and philosophical habits. He had been a favoured correspondent of the most eminent Frenchmen at that time, who cultivated literature jointly with philosophy. Voltaire, Diderot, Maupertuis, Condorcet, with D'Alembert, had all treated him with distinction; and I have heard my mother say that, in days before I or my sister could have known him, he attempted vainly to interest her in these French luminaries by reading extracts of their frequent letters which, however, so far from reconciling her to the letters or to the writers of the letters, had the unhappy effect of rivetting her dislike (previously budding) to the doctor, as their receiver, and the *proneur* of their authors. The tone of the letters, hollow, insincere, and full of courtly civilities to Dr Percival as a known friend of the 'tolerance' certainly was not adapted to the English taste; and in this respect was specially offensive to my mother, as always assuming of the doctor, that by mere necessity of being a philosopher, he must be an infidel.[100]

Percival himself never spoke of his religious opinions, according to De Quincey who, as a child, had attracted the doctor's attention and who liked him.

Percival's character traits are delineated at greater length in his son's *Memoirs*. These and the accounts given of him in the autobiographical writings of his colleagues and friends stress those qualities which made him a valuable mediator. His son sketched his social character and portrayed him as the embodiment of the virtue of candour.

> His skill in conducting rational and polite conversation was among the most conspicuous of his accomplishments. The tranquil facility of his discourse rendered it peculiarly agreeable to his hearers, and left them at liberty to admire the graces of elegance and perspicuity. Exempt alike from the pedantry of the declaimer, the man of fashion, or the student, he neither sought 'to dazzle with a luxury of light' nor studied to disguise the real merit or value of his opinions.[101]

Percival's social skills may have owed some of their quality to the fact that he had the good fortune not to be entirely confined to the social and intellectual structures of a small provincial town: